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SUBJECT: VISITING AFGHAN GOVERNORS ASK ITALY FOR MORE
TROOPS, DEVELOPMENT AID

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary. The Governors of Afghanistan's Farah and Bamyan Provinces visited Rome April 20-21 on the first leg of a tour of Europe co-sponsored by Embassy Kabul, USNATO and Embassies Rome and The Hague. In a very successful series of meetings with Members of Parliament, MFA and MOD officials, journalists, think tanks and university students, the Governors thanked Italy for its security and development assistance in their provinces while stressing the urgent need for more troops and aid. Governor Amin of Farah, which lies in Italy's Regional Command West, said a more visible Italian security presence (patrols and attack helicopters) would deter insurgents and drug traffickers and reassure local communities who fear a return of the Taliban. He lamented that Italian ISAF forces did not support his poppy eradication efforts and rebutted Italian parliamentarians who suggested the international community should purchase Afghan opium for medicinal purposes. Governor Sarabi of Bamyan, Afghanistan's only woman governor (and a Shi'ia), told concerned Parliamentarians that the Shi'ia "family law" is unconstitutional and will likely be repealed by President Karzai upon review. Parliamentarians and aid officials told her they would increase their efforts to finish work on Italy's long-delayed Kabul-Bamyan highway project. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) Governor Roohul Amin of Farah Province and Governor Habiba Sarabi of Bamyan Province visited Rome on April 20-21 as part of a USNATO tour of Europe. At parliament, they met with a joint session of the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees, the Presidents of the Senate Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Committees and other Senators. They also met with MFA Director for Afghanistan Sergio Mercuri, Italian aid officials, and Officers of the Italian Defense General Staff in charge of civil-military reconstruction activities in Regional Command West. In a session organized by the Public Affairs Section and hosted by the Afghan Embassy, the Governors were interviewed by journalists from wire services and two of Italy's leading TV newscasts and met with think tankers and university students (reported separately in PA channels). The two TV stations aired extensive coverage of Governor Sarabi's comments.

¶4. (SBU) Governor Amin thanked Italy for sending troops to Farah province, and underscored that they are doing "an excellent job," as are U.S. Marines operating in the eastern

part of the province bordering Helmand. He asked for more troops and two attack helicopters, noting that for villagers and insurgents helicopters are a visible expression of ISAF's power that reinforce the impression that the government is providing security. More (and more frequent) Italian patrols would have a similar effect. Although the Governor's farmer education and poppy eradication efforts have led to a decrease in poppy cultivation this year, Farah is still the second largest poppy producer after Helmand. He lamented that Italian troops based in Delaram had blocked his eradication tractors from moving into a poppy-growing district, forcing them to go to a different district where U.S. Marines assisted in eradication. (Note: Despite the recent NATO decision to support CN efforts, the Italian military is opposed to using troops for this purpose). To those parliamentarians (including center-right Defense Committee President Cirielli) who suggested that the international community should buy Afghan opium for medicinal purposes, Amin retorted that this would boost the profits of insurgents and drug traffickers, violate the Afghan constitution, and undermine efforts underway to promote alternative crops. Amin praised the work of the U.S. PRT in Farah and asked for additional Italian aid in the province, citing irrigation and road construction as major priorities.

15. (SBU) Governor Sarabi's province of Bamyan, by contrast, is relatively secure, with only small pockets of insurgent activity. The main problems the remote, mountainous province faces are poverty, lack of infrastructure and the discrimination against the province's dominant Hazara ethnic group (of which Sarabi is a member). When urged to finish work on the long-delayed 136 km Kabul-Bamyan highway, Italian aid officials said that of the 104 million Euros allocated for the road, 56 million had yet to be disbursed, but that

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the first stage (54 km) of the road is largely finished. Bids for the second stage are being reviewed and Italy hopes to begin construction before winter. Parliamentarians Margherita Boniver and Emma Bonino, both strong supporters of Afghan reconstruction, were disappointed to hear that the road was still not finished and pledged to try to accelerate the Italian effort. Sarabi said Bamyan has been poppy-free for three years, so it benefits from funding under the U.S. "good performer" initiative. Sarabi, who is Shi'ia, was asked several times about the Shi'ia "family law" which has generated controversy in the Italian press. Both she and Governor Amin stressed that the law is unconstitutional, did not receive proper scrutiny in Parliament, and would likely be overturned by President Karzai after being reviewed by a panel of jurists. Both governors urged Italy to be steadfast in its commitment to Afghanistan as several parliamentarians voiced reservations about the duration and effectiveness of the Italian mission.

16. (SBU) Comment: The success of this program demonstrates why it is so important to have Afghan voices engage directly with European opinion and decision-makers. The GOI is at times hesitant to promote its Afghanistan mission before Italian publics, so this visit was a welcome novelty that attracted high-level interest and broad public interest. Coming from provinces with Italian military or development aid involvement, these two governors were a perfect fit for Rome. The governors gave detailed, polished presentations and engaged in substantive and at times tough discussions with their interlocutors. Their requests have particular resonance now as the Berlusconi government is contemplating sizable cuts in defense spending and foreign aid. GOI interlocutors are used to hearing these requests coming from post and from USG visitors; hearing them directly from Afghans has a much greater impact. This was a high-value program, worth repeating. End Comment.

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